

HOW MIGHT FIA DELIVER MORE INFORMATION ON STATUS AND TRENDS OF NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS?

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Abstract—Data from the Forest Inventory and Analysis program (including the Timber Products Output portion) are critical for assessing the sustainability of US timber production. Private sector users of this information rely on it for strategic planning, and their strong support of the FIA program has helped to ensure funding and program viability. Non-timber forest products harvested from US forests also play a critical economic and social role, yet much less is known about their abundance, spatial distribution, and trends. Recent research has demonstrated that FIA data can provide important insights into the status of NTFPs from trees measured in Phase II plots. However, there are several shortcomings that prevent the widespread use of FIA data for evaluation of many other NTFPs. These shortcomings include: (1) lack of data on non-tree (typically understory) species of importance, (2) traditional forest inventory measurements that are unrelated to non-timber products (roots, sap, seeds and cones, bark, boughs, etc.), (3) lack of data on harvest and trade of non-timber forest products. Efforts to overcome these challenges in order to enhance the value of information for NTFP assessment might include: (1) identifying minor alterations to data collection protocols (perhaps on phase III plots), (2) conduct research that relates production of NTFPs to tree/plant measurements (e.g., estimation of bark or nut yield based on tree or plot measurements), (3) collecting data on NTFP abundance and distribution that would support modeling of likely occurrence, (4) extending the TPO data collection to survey non-timber forest product markets. We suggest that considering the costs and benefits of these and other options is the first step in expanding the value of the FIA program for NTFP assessment.

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